

BISWANATH BANERJEE

ETHICS AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE *RĀMĀYANA*

Vālmīki's *Rāmāyana* is a unique literary creation acclaimed as the bedrock of Indian morality moulding the life, thought and activities of Indians for centuries. The epic contains universal precepts for the regulation of human conduct in all actions and conditions. Without going into technical details the work instructs us in the duties of life. The sage-poet has asserted the force and efficacy of the good and the truthful against the utmost evil, teaching us to love and practise virtues. Like the *Gītā* the poem interprets the world as a battlefield where the ethical force becomes victorious against the non-ethical. Like any other Indian text of this nature ethics, religion and philosophy have been propounded here in a manner that has sustained the highest ideal of humanity in India since time immemorial. It is not a vain boast of the poet when he claims that his life-graphy of Rāma shall endure so long as the rivers and the mountains will exist on the earth¹:

*yāvat sthāsyanti girayah saritaś ca mahītale /
tāvad Rāmāyana kathā lokesu pracariyati //*

The epic has sometimes been held as an allegorical poem, a tale of conflict between the *deva*, the divine Power which is the inspiration of the intelligence-stuff, *sāttvika-pravṛtti*, and the *asura*, the demonic force which is the inspiration of the energy-stuff, *rājasa-*

1. VRā. I.2.36.

pravṛtti. The *Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣat* speaks² of two sons of *Prajāpati*, the Creator – the *asuras*, the elders, and the *devas*, the youngers. Both of them aspired after the lordship of whole of the sensual world for their exclusive enjoyment and the *devas* declared that they would defeat the *asuras* by the *udgītha*³ i.e., the Power of the *OM-kāra*. The two sons of the Creator are *Vāk*, the speech, and the *Prāṇas*, the vital winds. They attain divinity or demonic status by their respective conducts. Equipped with śāstric knowledge and consecrated by the results of the performance of *karman* the *Prāṇas* become the *devas*, while those with worldly knowledge having performed *karman* guided by material sense-perception and inference and applying them only to self-gratification are considered as the *asuras*. Faculties like *Vāk* with the intelligence-stuff or *sattva-guṇa* and those with the energy-stuff or *rajo-guṇa* have come to be designated gradually as the *devas* and *asuras* respectively.

As with the sons of the Creator every created being particularly man is having a constant conflict between the two elements of good or *deva* and evil or *asura*. The *devas* are younger i.e., lesser numerically and the *asuras* are elder or larger in numbers. Since every man desires to gain material enjoyment and to perform such actions as are cognizable by sense-perception and inference, while, on the other hand, attainment of śāstric knowledge and performance of *karman* accordingly are no easy task and inspiration to such things does not come often, the former is larger in numbers than the latter. It is a natural phenomenon that attraction for sensual enjoyments or dominance of an evil propensity comes up in the mind of a human being first, and later by a wise counsel or inspired by an example set by truthful one such a bent of mind is overcome leading to a divine state. In the minds of human beings these two elements are fighting each other constantly. When the *sattva-guṇa* prevails it is the time for righteousness and truth elevating man to a higher state equaling divinity, and when the *rajas*-quality is in full swing it is the reign of the *asuras*, while a state of equality between the two creates the realm of man. The fight between the *devas* and *asuras* is the fight between the good

2. *Brhadāraṇyaka*. I.3.i.

3. *Loc. cit.*

and the bad, between the *sat* and the *asat*. The *Kenopaniṣat* exemplifies how the demonic inspiration of self-praising or an egoist propensity brings about the discomfiture of gods. It is only after the removal of this attitude that they regain lost glory and power. In the *Kathopaniṣat* Yama advises Naciketas about *śreyas*, the superior bliss or fortune and the *preyas* or worldly happiness or fortune, which are nothing but the divine state and demonic spirits respectively. The attainment of the *śreyas* is extremely difficult and ordinary men are inclined to win the *preyas* in the form of material wealth. But the *preyas* can not bring about peace and happiness in a man and instances are not rare in the world that wealthy people well established in life suffer from mental disquietude. A constant fight between the *śreyas* and the *preyas* is going on in their minds where the attraction for the *preyas* becomes irresistible. For the attainment of the *śreyas* it is necessary to possess sublime qualities like practice of meditation (*tapasyā*), endurance (*dhairyā*), non-covetousness (*alobha*), non-violence (*ahimsā*). Without divine grace and effects of the performance of meritorious *karman* the *śreyas* can not be achieved⁴.

With this background of the Upaniṣadic idea of the good and the bad, the *sat* and the *asat*, the *śreyas* and the *preyas*, it is possible to explain the epic poem as an allegory of a fight between the divine qualities and demonic spirits. Rāma is the symbol of divine aspirations and Rāvaṇa stands for the demonic spirits. In the beginning Rāvaṇa and his associates of the *rajo-guna* have triumphed but ultimately can not stand before the divine aspirations of Rāma possessing *sattva*-quality. The *rākṣasas* are annihilated and the good prevails over the evil. Rāma has appeared on the earth to uproot the demonic influence and establish the rule of righteousness. Vālmīki proves beyond doubt that whatever success the evil aspirations might achieve at the outset it is sure to lose the ground at the end. Rāvaṇa with his demonic force of the *rajas*-quality has terrified the three worlds only to be routed by Rāma of the *sattva*-quality. Undoubtedly Rāvaṇa symbolises the evil aspirations since he is neither penitent about his wrongful actions or misconduct nor has he the least prick of conscience against committing any sin. In Rāvaṇa are found in abundance those evil possessions like vanity, ego, cruelty,

4. *Kaṭha*, I.3.xiv.

ignorance etc. which are generally considered as unholy propensities. Rāma, on the other hand, is clearly a man of *sattva*-quality. In the beginning of the poem Rāma has been referred to as a man, perhaps a man *par excellence*, and the aim of Vālmīki seems to have been the characterisation of Rāma as a human being who by his attainments and qualities elevates himself to the state of divinity. It was perhaps Vālmīki's idea that abstract moral philosophy or sermons without a touch of the real life and devoid of practical utility may not be able to influence or mould the course of human nature and conduct. He has depicted the career of Rāma to advise us to emulate Rāma who has created a moral standard by his actions and sufferings and we see before us his reactions to serious problems in highly critical situations. Vālmīki's characters are full-blooded men with superior moral stature. It is well said⁵ that one «who reads the *Rāmāyana* thinking that ... he is dealing with God, will get nothing out of it». Rāma is not to be considered 'as a man in whom there was all knowledge, all propriety, all virtues from the beginning, unfailing till the very end. That is not the way to read his life but as a man who struggled, was tempted, who had his weakness»⁶. Not only Rāma but Sītā, Sumantra, Bharata, Lakṣmaṇa and others also have emotional upheavals or explosions under the strain of life and all of them behave like common men⁷.

Many times we find Rāma confronted with both the *śreyas* and *preyas* at the same time and always he is set to accept the *śreyas* without hesitation. He loses his throne and has to go in exile at the moment of his consecration. He does not protest against it nor does he blame his father and step-mother for this sudden turn of events. He does not even express his resentment or excitement over it but accepts the situation with fortitude and calmness. He tells his step-mother that he does not like to be there as one seeking personal interests – *nāham artha* *paro devi lokam āvastum utsahe*⁸. Rāma consoles his afflicted mother lamenting at the news of her son's banishment by saying that he is to abide by the verdict of his father and that is the eternal law:

5. BENJAMIN KHAN, *The Concept of Dharma*, p. 2.

6. *Loc. cit.*

7. VRĀ. II.63.41.

8. *Ibid.* II.19.20.

pitur niyoge sthātavyam esa dharmah sanātanaḥ⁹. At the end of the Laṅkā-war Rāma advised his hesitant associate Vibhīṣaṇa to perform the last rites of Rāvaṇa properly. Enmity ceases with death and our aim has been achieved; do the last rites, it is my wish like that of yours¹⁰:

*maraṇāntāni vairāṇi nirvṛttam nah prayojanam /
kriyatām adya saṃskārō mamāpyeṣa yathā tava //*

Vasiṣṭha could not stop Rāma from going to the forest as Rāma would not make his father Daśaratha behave falsely¹¹. Bharata appreciates the unruffled nature of Rāma whether in distress or in delight and in his estimate he is a *sthitaprajña*, one firmly established in his wisdom¹².

Almost in all its discourses and episodes, in the sermons and panegyrics we observe philosophical trends sometimes very clearly and somewhere underlying in a subtle manner. It is possible that the Sāṃkhya system in its crude form held the minds of the people of the age. Everything including man is found to be considered as composed of five elements, *pañcatattvam āpanne*¹³. According to the poet «earth, air, ether, water and light retain their eternal course, maintaining their respective natures». We may perhaps consider the verses of the epic with philosophical fervour as grouped under the following topics:

1. The Supreme Lord (Parameśvara), the nature of the Brahman
2. The theory of *karman*, the performance of *karman* without desire (*niṣkāma karma*), prescribed *karman*, meritorious *karman*, the retribution
3. Untrue nature of the world, its impermanence
4. The theory of *Kāla*, Time, role of destiny, Fate etc.

There are a good number of places where salutations offered or references made to Rāma bear much similarity with the Upaniṣadic concept of Brahman and the Supreme Lord. In the words of Vaśiṣṭha, Sumitrā and Bharata we find such ideas. While describing the family

9. *Ibid.* II.21.49.

10. *Ibid.* VI.109.25.

11. *Ibid.* II.111.11.

12. *Ibid.* VI.109.25.

13. *Ibid.* I.77.24.

of the Ikṣvākus Vaśiṣṭha describes Brahman as eternal, immutable, always-existing which reminds us of the *Kaṭhopaniṣat*¹⁴ describing Ātman as *ajo nityah śāśvato'yaṁ purāṇah*. Consoling a grief-stricken Kauśalyā Sumitrā describes Rāma as the Lord of Lords, Sun of the Suns, Agni of Agni and so on which reflects the Upaniṣadic utterances as in the *Kena*, *Katha* or *Brhadāraṇyaka*¹⁵. When urged and entreated by Bharata Rāma declines to return to Ayodhyā Bharata becomes extremely sorry. Rāma advises Bharata about the impermanent and mutable nature of the world. Bharata refers to Rāma as one for whom sufferings or happiness is of no effect as he has realised the Ātman. Just as a dead being has no utility with the body, in the same way one equipped with the knowledge of Ātman remains detached from the interest about his own body even when he is alive. None can bear any malice or attachment towards a non-existent matter so also one realising the Supreme can not entertain any feeling of attachment or non-attachment even when the matter exists¹⁶:

*yathā mṛtas tathā jīvan yathāsati tathā sati /
yasyaiśa buddhilābhāḥ syāt paritapyeta kena saḥ //*

Gītā speaks¹⁷ in the same vein about a *sthitaprajña*:
*rāgadveṣa viyuktais tu viṣayān indriyaiś caran /
ātmavaśyair vidheyātmā prasādam adhigacchati //*

During the Laṅkā-war the sage Agastya inspires a fatigued and worried Rāma by giving him in secret the *Āditya-hṛdaya-stotra* revealing to him the nature and importance of the Sun-god which appears to be in no way different from the nature and greatness of the Brahman or Supreme Lord. The *devatā* is here saluted as the nature of all gods and he protects the gods, the divine beings (*sura*) and the three worlds. He is Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva etc. and by his brilliance Sūrya enlivens and inspires the world. The *Aitareya*, *Śvetāśvatara* and *Īśopaniṣad* describe Āditya almost in the same manner¹⁸. The *devatā* is further saluted

14. *Kaṭha*. I.2.xviii.

15. *Kena*. I.2; *Brhadāraṇyaka*. IV.4.xviii; *Kaṭha*. II.2.xv.

16. VRā. II.106.4ff.

17. *Gītā* II.64.

18. *Aitareya*. III.1.3; *Śvetāśvatara*. IV.2.4.

here as the one who lords over the stars, constellations, planets and protects the universe. He is of the nature of consciousness (*cinmaya*) blooming all luminous matters like food etc. and is himself luminous by nature. Reminding us of the Śvetāśvatara¹⁹ salutation is offered to the bright and effulgent one, the heroic, the waker of the lotus and the variegated one. While lamenting over her slain consort Mandodarī salutes Rāma as the One without a beginning or end, as the Great of the Greats having assumed the form of a human being. He is the Viṣṇu with Truth as the Power²⁰. This is almost an echo of the concept in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* IV.4.20. Sītā is about to enter the fire for the ordeal when the assembled gods salute Rāma as the Creator of all the worlds, the all-pervasive One, the object of meditation of the Wise²¹, – which brings us very close to the image given in the Śvetāśvatara²². Rāma's description²³ as the eighth of the Rudras, the fifth of the sādhyas, are very much in the manner of the *Mundaka* II.1.4. Brahmā prays to Rāma as *sahasraśrīga*, one with thousand pinnacles, as *sataśīrsa*, one with hundred heads, as the first Creator of the three worlds²⁴ which is expressive of the same idea as in the *mantra*²⁵:

*sahasraśīrsa puruṣaḥ sahsrākṣaḥ sahsrapāt /
sa bhūmim viśvato vṛtvā tyatiṣṭhaddaśāngulam //*

In Brahmā's description of Rāma as holding the three worlds in his body with Brahmā as the heart, the goddess of learning as the tongue, the gods in the hairs of the body (*roma*), with the day as his opening of eyes (*unmeṣa*) and the night as his shutting of the eyes (*nimeṣa*) takes us very near to the Viśvarūpadarśana in the *Gītā*. *Kāla*, the emissary of Brahmā to Rāma says that he was created by Rāma when he was lying in the ocean-bed²⁶. When Rāma comes to the bank of the river *Sarayū*

19. Śvetāśvatara. I.12; VI.11; VI.16.

20. VRĀ. VI.111.12-13.

21. *Ibid.* VI.112.5.

22. Śvetāśvatara. IV.15.

23. VRĀ. VI.117.8. – The sādhyas were created after gods with natures exquisitely refined. In later mythology their numbers have been variously referred to as 12 and 17. Yāska assigns them *Bhuvar loka*, a region between the earth and the Sun as their locality.

24. *Ibid.* VI.117.18

25. Śvetāśvatara. III.14.

26. VRĀ. VII.104.4.

to give up his worldly existence Brahmā salutes Rāma possessing the great spirits of Viṣṇu as the great eternal sky, the resort of the whole world whom none can realise, and in these passages the ideas expressed in the *Śvetāśvatara* and the *Kauśītaki* can be easily traced²⁷.

The theory of *karman* in its various aspects, such as *karman* without cherishing any desire, meritorious *karman*, the unfailing results of *karman* has been treated in the *Rāmāyaṇa* through the utterances of the different characters. All the orthodox schools of Indian philosophy including the Jainas and the Bauddhas recognize the doctrine of *karman* and the idea of retribution. The doctrine of *karman* and the imperishable nature of the effects of *karman* have gone deep into the minds of Indians and in the *Rāmāyaṇa* also we find expression of this thought or idea. Almost all the characters in the epic refer to the unfailing force of karmic effects. The idea of retribution and of enjoying the fruits of good or bad actions may be traced in the *Samhitās*, and the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* speaks of an imperishable *karman* which is not destroyed even though the body perishes²⁸. We find a lamenting Daśaratha explaining to his wife Kauśalyā immediately after Rāma's departure for the forest, the effects of *karman*²⁹:

yad ācarati kalyāṇi śubham vā yadi vāśubham /
tad eva labhate bhadre kartā karmajam ātmanāḥ //

whatever *karman* is performed, good or bad, the doer gets results of his doings accordingly. Rāma told Khara, the brother-general of Rāvaṇa in the *Dandaka* forest³⁰:

na cirāt prāpyate loke pāpānāṁ karmaṇāṁ phalam /
saviṣāṇāṁ ivānnānāṁ bhuktānāṁ kṣaṇadācara //

The doer of any sinful action enjoys its results without delay in the way a man eating poisonous food suffers from its effects immediately. Mandodarī laments over the tragedy of her husband who, she thinks, has been slain because of his sinful actions³¹:

śubhakṛc chubham āpnoti pāpakṛt pāpam aśnute /
Vibhīṣaṇāḥ sukhāṁ prāptas tvam prāptaḥ pāpam īdrśam //

27. *Ibid.* VII.110.10-12; *Śvetāśvatara*. I.10, IV.10; *Kauśītaki*. III.8.

28. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*. IV.4.v ff.

29. VRā. II.63.6.

30. *Ibid.* III.29.9.

31. *Ibid.* VI.111.26.

Good actions entail good results and bad actions end in bad results, that is why Vibhīṣaṇa enjoys happiness and tragedy has befallen Rāvaṇa. Even a distressed Rāma considers the loss of Sītā as owing to his own previous misdeeds³²:

*pūrvam̄ mayā nūnam abhīpsitāni pāpāni karmāṇyasya kṛtāni /
tatrāyam adya patito vipāko duḥkhena duḥkhām̄ yad aham viśāmi //*

In Indian philosophy, particularly in Buddhism, the essence of *karman* is will and it is primarily a voluntary mental act. It is through this mental act that verbal and physical actions also become *karman*. In the same way Vālmīki holds *will* as the cause of *karman* which is somewhat a psychological function. Man is the projection of his *karman*. Hanumān is referring to mind as the very cause of all actions³³. Sītā objects to the moral judgment given by Rāma on forced and physical actions saying that though her person was touched by another, it was not a wilful act on her part³⁴. It is mind that does the action not the body, it is the intention that counts and that makes all the difference. Transmigration or Rebirth is closely related to the doctrine of *karman* but we find Vālmīki having a firm faith in a happy immortality for a doer of meritorious deeds to be spent in the Heaven and a life in the Hell is certain for an evil-doer. The theory of Rebirth and the fear of dying again and again in worldly existence do not appear to have been considered by the poet. There are, however, a few hints of sufferings because of actions in previous births but these may be taken at best to be the outbursts of afflicted persons in mental agony. Daśaratha, Rāma, Kauśalyā, Sītā, Tārā curse themselves and believe that such calamities have befallen them because of sinful acts in previous births³⁵. These cases do not necessarily mean that the poet recognizes the theory of *karman* «implying an interminable chain of births and deaths. In no place do we have an unequivocal assertion that the Jīva undergoes repeated births and deaths on account of deeds done in the past»³⁶. Vālmīki's theory of *karman* becomes interesting when we hear that the

32. *Ibid.* III.63.4.

33. *Ibid.* V.11.41-42.

34. *Ibid.* VI.116.8.

35. *Ibid.* II.53.19; III.63.4-5.

36. BENJAMIN KHAN, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

fruits of one's good actions are transferable to others. Śarabhaṅga offers to Rāma to enjoy the fruits of his good actions and Sutīkṣṇa desires Rāma to live delightfully with his wife and brother in the regions won by his pious acts³⁷. The World, the Heaven, the Hell are all found to be recognized in the *Rāmāyaṇa* while the expression *māyā* occurs in the sense of magic only and perhaps never in the sense as inculcated in the *Upaniṣads* or *Vedānta*. Vālmīki's treatment of the theory of *karman* explains it as a law of moral retribution and a theory of recompense by which the committed sin recoils on the doer as well as on the other members of the community.

There are observations on the untrue nature and impermanence of the world. Rāma advises Bharata about the ultimate perishable nature of the worldly existence, about the transitoriness of the world itself. He says that with associations and separations the life ends in death, everything is subject to decay and all elevated things are liable to be levelled down³⁸. These observations take us unmistakably to the ideas of similar nature expressed in the *Upaniṣads* and the *Gītā*³⁹.

The influence of *Kāla*, Time, and its sway on the world of beings are discussed at many places in the epic and Fate or Destiny plays an important role here. Most of the cases extolling Fate are observations by Rāma. It appears that being hit again and again by unfortunate turn of events Rāma has tried to seek consolation in the workings of Fate. Fate is generally considered in popular estimate as an absolute and irresistible force whose movement can neither be stopped nor turned aside. Man has no power to check its operation and can not but surrender to its influence. Fate or Destiny is also variously referred to in the epic as *daiva*, *vidhi*, *adrsta*, *niyati* etc. having exalted power on human free-will and initiativeness. Vālmīki seems to have identified *Kāla* with death and destiny and in the popular literature of India these three terms have been used almost interchangeably. It is observed that *niyati* is the prime cause in this world and the source of accomplishment of action, it leads man to action. The wise can perceive the works of Time and *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma* are all subject

37. VRā. III.6.41, 5.31.

38. *Ibid.* II.105.16 ff.

39. *Kaṭha*. I.1-16, 26; *Gītā* II.27.

to it. *Kāla* has been said to be the creator and destroyer of all things and none is mightier than Time which is difficult to overcome. Rāma holds Destiny as the only cause of his loss of the kingdom followed by the banishment. It is observed that all creatures are subject to Destiny and Destiny can not be set aside⁴⁰.

Vālmīki has indicated the power and influence of *Kāla* and Destiny perhaps as a concession to the popular idea and philosophy since we find him criticizing the attitude of giving undue importance to *daiva* or Fate: *kim nāma kṛpanām daivam aśaktam abhiśamsasi?* – why do you extol destiny which is weak and powerless?⁴¹ Rāma's fatalism which may be called 'a philosophy of mechanical determinism' has been challenged by Lakṣmaṇa very forcefully since he counts on manliness (*puruṣakāra*) only for the accomplishment of a desired object. He urges Rāma to disregard destiny if he thinks it to be the cause of his losing the kingdom, it is only the weak and who has no energy, thinks Lakṣmaṇa, advocates the path of destiny, while a valiant person with a composed mind pays no regard to it. Lakṣmaṇa declares that people would now experience which is more powerful, destiny or manliness, and swears to defeat the evil agency of destiny by his manliness. He implores Rāma to stop the movement of destiny with exertions since human initiative is a stronger force than the power of destiny which is invisible (*adr̥ṣṭa*)⁴². It is further observed in the *Kiṣkindhā kāṇḍa*⁴³ that a person exercising intelligence is never defeated by Fate. It seems that Vālmīki believes in the power of human exertions over *adr̥ṣṭa* or Fate and in that matter he is perhaps nearer to Manu who urges us to act and not to think on destiny⁴⁴. Vālmīki does not recommend to depend on fate for any success. Even if there be a destiny, Vālmīki believes that human effort can change the course of destiny. According to the poet only the ignorant, the superstitious or the unmindful can believe in the force of destiny above human efforts.

40. VRā. VI.32.13; 48.19.

41. *Ibid.* II.23.7.

42. *Ibid.* II.23.16 ff.

43. *Ibid.* IV.7.9.

44. *Manu.* VII.205.

Of the four objects of human pursuit (*caturvarga*) or values of life, i.e., *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, *mokṣa*, Vālmīki speaks of the first three (*trivarga*) only and the fourth or the ideal of *mokṣa* in its accepted meaning seems to be absent in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It has been observed⁴⁵ that the writers of the epics were conscious of the ideal of *mokṣa* but they were more interested in the welfare of the common man for whom the *mokṣa*-concept has but little importance. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, however, we do not find that the discussion on any moral concept of the age has been left out and that makes us to think reasonably that if the *mokṣa*-concept was known at that time it would not have escaped the attention of a poet like Vālmīki.

Dharma is not religion or a creed, it is essentially a mode of life, a social principle of right conduct regulating the activities of an individual as a member of the society so that he can reach the goal of human existence⁴⁶. But when an individual withdraws himself from all the pleasures and interests of the world, he needs the ideal of *mokṣa* more than that of the *dharma*. The purview of *dharma* is the *samsāra* and it is the norm for action for the world, but *mokṣa* is other-worldly and aims at cessation of actions. Vālmīki's concept of life is marked by the idea of a happy or miserable existence in heaven or in earth but does not seem to have advocated for a cessation of existence. The pursuit of the *dharma*-ideal can not take one beyond the range of *karman* and transmigration while the *mokṣa*-ideal is outside the scope of the two. Right actions for the welfare of mankind, may be even on spiritual planes, comprise *dharma* but *mokṣa* is an inward exertion for the attainment of right knowledge to know the *ātman*.

Vālmīki portrays Rāma as an incarnation of *dharma* who professes to uproot the evils (*adharma*) and establishes a realm of righteousness. As it is said Truth must prevail and *dharma* is the basis of Truth: *dharmaḥ hi paramo loke dharme satyam pratiṣṭhitam*⁴⁷. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* Vālmīki uses the terms *satya* and *dharma* interchangeably. Vālmīki advises to accumulate *dharma* and *artha* and through them *kāma*, since *kāma* without *dharma* and *artha* is nothing but lust.

45. M. HIRIYANNA, *A Quest after Perfection*, p. 102.

46. P.V. KANE, *Indian Inheritance*, Vol. III, p. 41.

47. VRā. II.41.

Detached from the other two *kāma* degenerates into frustration and no social or moral order can develop on man's desires only. Kauṭilya has spoken⁴⁸ of *artha* as the chief among the three values but Vālmīki places *dharma* as the supreme and declares that *kāma* without a moral justification is a vile thing⁴⁹. Since very ancient times it has been emphasised in India to curb the force of *kāma* by self-discipline and consequently to get to *dharma*. Vālmīki is not in favour of asceticism like many other ancient thinkers and recommends that *kāma* should be done away with by one's strong will, by intelligence etc. One should not escape from it but should overcome it⁵⁰. *Artha* has been considered to help the acquiring of *dharma* and it is instrumental to the culture of *dharma*⁵¹.

In the epic Lakṣmaṇa favours *artha* as the only object of human effort and totally rejects *dharma*. He thinks *dharma* has no force to deliver Rāma from his calamities. He does not accept the existence of *dharma* since it can not be perceived. Had there been anything like *dharma* a personality of the stature of Rāma would not have been subjected to so many catastrophic circumstances⁵². It is a veiled Cārvāka logic, nevertheless it is a realistic criticism of the *dharma*-ideal. Lakṣmaṇa further⁵³ argues that a non-virtuous Rāvaṇa is holding the upperhand while Rāma, an ideal virtuous one, is suffering so much. He feels that the results or effects so long assigned to *dharma* and *adharma* have not been rightly done as they produce opposite results. He is very strongly resenting the supreme position allotted to *dharma* when he argues that if destiny is all-powerful and everything is pre-determined and beyond the scope of man's free-will, then performance of evil or meritorious things becomes immaterial⁵⁴. Why should *dharma* be sought after if it has not the power to change the course of destiny?⁵⁵ In this way Lakṣmaṇa criticises *dharma* and

48. See P.V. KANE, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

49. VRā. III.38.21-22 etc.

50. *Ibid.* V.21.7 ff.

51. *Ibid.* II.99.34.

52. *Ibid.* VI.83.14 ff.

53. *Loc. cit.*

54. *Loc. cit.*

55. VRā. VI.83.28 ff.

destiny at length and it seems Vālmīki is preaching a practical philosophy of morals. It is not that the poet does not believe in social or moral values but he thinks that asceticism or over-spiritualism can not be conducive to the welfare and well-being of a man. Lakṣmaṇa does believe in social values but he is just practical and realistic in his approach and attitude⁵⁶. In his treatment of the subject Vālmīki has projected himself as being more worldly in his ethical outlook. Vālmīki does not believe in a fixed path for the *dharma* and to him morality requires to be determined by proper reflection⁵⁷. He thinks that the voice of conscience should guide a man in discerning his duty in every situation: *buddhyā yuktā mahāprājñāḥ vijānanti subhāsubhe*⁵⁸. Vālmīki calls Truth the real *dharma* of life, Truth is the supreme in the world.

Select Bibliography

Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa

- Nirṇaya sāgara Press Edn., Bombay, 1930.
- Āryaśāstra Edn., Calcutta, 1963.
- Poona Edn., 1962.
- English Trans. by M.N. Dutta, Calcutta, 1894.
- English Trans. by R.T.H. Griffith, London, 1889.

- 1) DUTTA, SVASTIKĀ, *Rāmāyaṇa Samikṣā*, Calcutta, 1979.
- 2) HOPKINS, E.W., *The Great Epics of India*, London, 1901.
- 3) KHAN, B., *The Concept of Dharma in Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, Delhi, 1965.
- 4) RAMASWAMI, K.S., *Studies in Rāmāyaṇa*, Madras, 1944.
- 5) VAIDYA, C.A., *The Riddle of the Rāmāyaṇa*, Bombay/London, 1906.

56. *Loc. cit.*

57. *Ibid.* III.66.15; IV.18.15 ff.

58. *Ibid.* III.66.15.